

Reports of school violence exaggerated, students say

BY NATALIE ALCOBA

Students at a pair of troubled Toronto high schools mostly shrugged off the Falconer report, acknowledging their schools are not safe but saying their problems are too often exaggerated.

"I'm still getting my work done. I'm still focused," said a Grade 11 student at Westview Centennial Secondary School, her legs dangling over a short cement wall.

But, she added: "You never know who you have a beef with. Say, right now. Somebody could be shooting at us. You know, a drive-by."

Added her friend: "None of these schools are safe."

A school safety report drawn up in the wake of the shooting death of Jordan Manners inside North York's C.W. Jefferys Collegiate Institute disclosed a number of violent incidents across public high schools that in-

volved guns and knives, as well as sexual assaults that went unreported. The panel also looked closely at Westview, a school that had transferred troubled students to neighbouring C.W. Jefferys.

Students at that Sentinel Road school said they were tired of being characterized by the media as "a bad school."

"There are many good things happening around the school, there's a lot of guidance and support. I think that should be told, too," said Mishaal Mughal, in Grade 12 at C.W. Jefferys. She noted that the school's administration is doing a better job of addressing reports of violence by talking openly with students about incidents.

Sarah Stewart, also in Grade 12, said she feels "perfectly safe" at C.W. Jefferys, and was shocked to hear that a number of her schoolmates reported having had a gun pointed at them at C.W. Jefferys.

"I don't think that there are any guns in the school. And I think that for them to bring in any dogs and the K-9 sniffing, I think that's an invasion of privacy and they shouldn't do it."

Another Grade 11 student said he has never been threatened by a weapon, although he has seen them inside Westview. "Not guns, just knives and stuff," he said. They are never used, he said, just shown off.

"They want to be known as gangsters or some crap like that," said the boy, who also questioned the validity of the report since he had heard classmates making answers up.

The young man appeared comfortable to talk to a reporter about his school's safety, until a fellow student yelled at him to keep quiet. Students at Westview and Emery Collegiate Institute, another North York school on Weston Road, south of Finch Avenue, reported that a culture of "do not snitch" abounds.

"They don't know what might happen to them, so they just keep it to themselves. They keep quiet," said Narita Hargobin, a Grade 11 student at Westview.

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SNAPSHOT OF TWO TROUBLED SCHOOLS

The Falconer report surveyed 423 students at C.W. Jefferys Collegiate Institute and 870 students at Westview Centennial Secondary School in Toronto. At both schools, most teachers are white, while more than 94% of students are not.

GUNS & WEAPONS



- 12%** Percentage of C.W. Jefferys students who had a gun pointed at them (or were shot at) on school property in the past two years.
- 22%** Percentage of C.W. Jefferys students who had been robbed or extorted on school property.
- 13%** Percentage of Westview students who said students bring weapons, including knives and guns, to school daily.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT



- 19%** Percentage of female C.W. Jefferys students who reported being sexually assaulted at school in the past two years.
- 29%** Percentage of female Westview students who reported unwanted sexual contact at school.
- 7%** Percentage of female Westview students who reported "major sexual assault" at school.

THE CODE OF SILENCE, GANGS AND RACE



- 90%** Percentage of students from both schools who witnessed a crime but did not report it to police.
- 17%** Percentage of Westview students who said they are, or used to be, gang members.
- 48%** Percentage of blacks at Westview who said discrimination makes it difficult for blacks to get good grades.

STAFF SAFETY CONCERNS



- 28%** Percentage of C.W. Jefferys teachers who had seen students with a gun, knives, bats or other weapons in the past two years.
- 52%** Percentage of C.W. Jefferys staff who had been threatened by student (and 39% sexually harassed).
- 37%** Percentage of Westview staff who worried about being shot or attacked with a weapon.